



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**Preferred Leadership Style among the Employees of Different Ethnicity on
Improving Work Performance**

Newley Cyla anak Genjer

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Newley Cyla anak Genjer (61726)

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Received for examination by:

Rusli bin Ahmad

(Dr. Rusli Bin Ahmad)

Date:

20 July 2020

Gred

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji mengenai gaya kepimpinan pilihan di antara pekerja yang berbilang etnik dalam meningkatkan prestasi pekerja. Kajian ini telah dijalankan di salah sebuah organisasi separuh kerajaan yang terletak di Kuching iaitu Sarawak Economic Development Corporation. Kajian ini juga berbentuk kualitatif di mana 6 orang informan yang terdiri daripada individu yang mempunyai etnik yang berbeza seperti Bidayuh, Melayu dan Cina. Satu set soalan temubual yang telah diadaptasi dari kajian lepas telah diguna pakai sebagai instrumen dalam kajian ini. Selain itu, data yang telah dikumpul semasa kajian in dijalankan akan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis kandungan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa pekerja yang terdiri daripada etnik yang berbeza mempunyai pilihan gaya kepimpinan mereka yang tersendiri. Daripada data yang telah dikumpul gaya kepimpinan transformasi merupakan gaya pimpinan yang paling banyak menjadi pilihan dikalangan pekerja berbanding dengan kepimpinan transaksional dan kepimpinan Laissez-Faire. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa setiap pekerja mempunyai persepsi mereka yang tersendiri mengenai cara seseorang ketua itu dapat menambah baik prestasi pekerja. Tambahan pula, setiap gaya kepimpinan mempunyai isu-isu tersendiri yang Perlu diambil kira dan diselesaikan. Konklusinya, pekerja yang terdiri daripada etnik yang berbeza mempunyai pemikiran mereka yang tersendiri mengenai gaya kepimpinan.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to investigate the preferred leadership among the employee of different ethnicity on improving work performance. This study has been conducted in one of the semi-government organization in Kuching which is the Sarawak Economic Development Corporation. This research is a qualitative study which involves the 6 employees from different ethnic such as the Bidayuh, Malay and Chinese. A set of interview question that has been adapted from past research is used as the instrument in this research. The data obtained from this research is analysed using the content analysis. From the study it can be found that some employees of different ethnicity have their own preferred leadership style. It can be highlighted that the transformational leadership is the most preferred leadership style compare to the others two which are the Transactional leadership and Laissez-Faire leadership style. Other than that, it also can be describe that employee have their own perception on how the leaders can help to improve their performance. Moreover, each of the leadership style has its own issue that need to be addressed and solved. It can be concluded that the employee of different ethnicity have their own thought on leadership styles.

Keywords: Leadership style, ethnicity, work performance, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This research is about ‘Preferred Leadership Style among the Employees of Different Ethnicity on Improving Work Performance’. The topic that will covered in this chapter is the background study, statement of problem, research question, research hypothesis, research framework, significant of study, definition of terms, and the summary of this chapter. This chapter is important because it offer the comprehensive perspectives and help to better understand the research.

1.1 Background of study

In the world of diversity, advancing technology, knowledge and the increasing in uncertainty between the organization, the leaders and their followers must plan strategy on how to cope will all of these issues (Asrar-ul-haq & Kuchinke, 2016). The employees itself play an important part in becoming one of the organization assets as they can influence how the organization adopt certain leadership style. According to Asrar-ul-haq and Kuchinke (2016) employees in the organization react differently toward several leadership styles. Thus, it is important to know from the perspective of the employees which leadership style have the bigger influence and can improve their work performance. Other than that, leadership past research also show that employee have their own perception on leadership style that can impact the organization. Therefore, in adopting certain leadership style, the employee point of view on preferred leadership style need to be considered.

It is common for the organization to have employees that are different on their identity and background. The diverse in employees need the organization to take into consideration on their employee differences when adopting leadership style (Martin, 2014). Employees that are diverse such as in term of ethnicity have different in their perception, way

of thinking, attitude, personality and culture (Martin, 2014). Thus, the employees have their own way of thinking and how they perceive that certain leadership style. All the employees want the best for the organization, thus the employee ideas on what is good for the organization should be known. As mention by Martin (2014) employees from different ethnicity may have different perception on the leadership style and whether it is good and fit for the organization. Thus, it is important for an employer to know what is employee perception toward certain leadership style and from that the organization able to come out with a leadership style that suitable for the organization. Therefore, the employee can influence the leadership style that the organization intend to use.

1.2 Statement of problem

In this new era, leadership is one of the important components in the organization. A good leadership can bring something new not only for the organization but also can produce better employees. Leadership can be defined as a person that has the capability to lead other to attain their goal (Rothwell, Prescott & Taylor, 2008). Apart from that that Pinnow (2011) also has state that how people with leadership were tremendously great in soft skill, owns vision, high emotional intelligence and fearless. Most leadership is related to how the leader adopted leadership style with his or her belief that it can guide their employees. Therefore, it can be shown that the employees or the follower perspective on the right leadership to be adopted in the organization is still lacking in studies and not further discussed.

Different leadership style can affect not only the employees but also the organization itself. Asrar-ul-haq and Kuchinke (2016) in their study found that the style of leadership can give a different effect or consequences to the employees that also affect the organization performance. It stated that employee attitude differ according to leadership adopted by the organization (Asrar-ul-haq & Kuchinke, 2016). Therefore, the organization need to have the knowledge how the employees perceive leadership style so that the organization can have an

insight how it influences their attitude. Apart from that, leadership also play an important part on the employee work performance. Past leadership research focus more how the leadership style from the perspective of the leader can help to improve the employee performance. This shows that research about the employee perspectives and preferences on leadership style and what contributing to their preferences is still lacking. Apart from that, for an organization to reach their goals, implementing the right leadership style that is suitable with the organization current situation and employee is very important (Liphadzi, Aigbavboa & Thwala, 2015). Thus, with the right leadership style that suits the organization and employee may increase their work performance.

On recent news, employee can perceive their leader that cannot cope or unable to manage their stress to be harmful to them and also organization (Lazarczyk, 2017). This shows how employee have own their own thought and perspective on their leader behaviour and attitude and how it can impact them as well as the organization. From this news, it that can be describe that the employee have the capability to know what is good and bad for organization. Therefore, the employees may have their own thought and preferences on what kind of leader that are good enough to improve the work performance and also the organization.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

According to Ahmad, Usop, Bujang & Abu Mansor (2014) research objectives refer to what the researcher want to achieve in the study. Research objectives is important as it help the researcher to be on track on what the research all about and also to enable the researcher to avoid collecting data that are not necessary for the study. Apart from that, research question is closely related to the research objectives. Research question can be defined as the question that the researcher wished to answer and prove (Ahmad et al., 2014)

i. General objective

To study the preferred leadership style among employees of different ethnicity on improving work performance.

ii. Specific objectives and research question

This section will report specific objectives in this study and also related research questions in pertaining to that particular specific objective.

Objective 1: To study preferred leadership style of each ethnicity.

The following is the **research question** for objective 1

- a) Is there preferred leadership style among each ethnicity
- b) How it can improve work performance

Objective 2: To explore reasons contributing to the preferred leadership style

The following is the **research question** objective 2

- a) What are the reasons contributing to the preferred leadership style

Objective 3: To identify issues on the leadership style chosen

The following is the **research question** for objective 3

- a) What are the issues on the leadership style chosen

Objective 4: To study coping strategies in tackling the issue

The following is the **research question** for objective 4

- a) What are the coping strategies to tackle the issue

1.4 Research framework

A research framework is important to that particular study because it help the researcher to identify the outputs that the research will produce (Ahmad et al., 2014). It also describes the technique used to produce the outputs. Therefore, research framework can shows the research activities and technique use to produce the outputs.

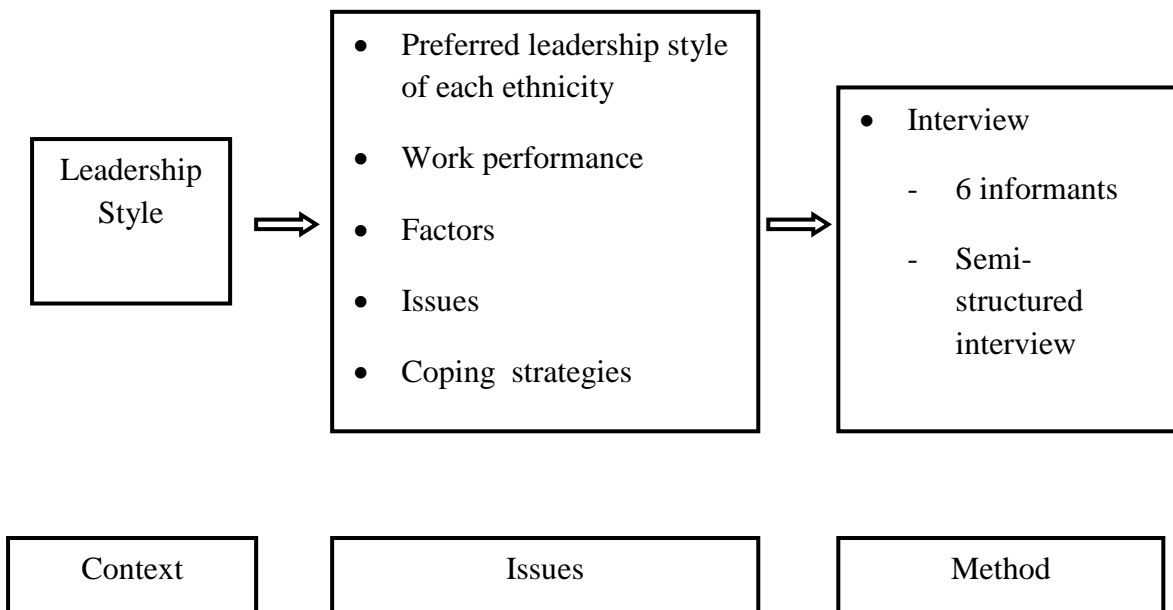


Figure 1: Research framework. Adapted from Conducting research in social sciences and management studies: Practical and step-by-step guide (2nd ed.) (p.42), by Ahmad et al., 2014, Kuching, Sarawak: RS Publishing House. Copyright 2014 by the InfoGrafik Press Sdn Bhd. Adapted with permission.

1.5 Significant of Study

This research aim to study more about the employees preferred leadership style and how it can improve the work performance. Some of the contribution of this study can be seen toward the body of knowledge, the policy and toward the practitioners.

The contribution of this study toward the body of knowledge is that this study is intend to study how each employees may have their own preferred leadership style. From the related past research most of the research focus more on the organization itself, in how the leadership style can affect the organization. In this particular study, the researcher intend to focus more on the employees perspectives in which it concern on what type of leadership style that the employees preferred that will improve the work performance. Thus, this study

will help in develop the employees' perspective on leadership style and how the leadership may affect the employee as well as the organization.

Other than that, the contribution of this study toward the policy is the data and result from this study can be used by the organization to implement the right leadership style depending on the perspective of their employees toward that certain specific leadership style. It is useful to know how a certain employees of different ethnicity may view and prefer certain leadership style, thus the employer can adopt different leadership style in managing the employee in the organization. This study can give information to the organization on which leadership style are more preferable among the employees.

The contribution of the research to the practitioner is that from this study the practitioner can develop new perspective on the issue. This will bring new question and issue to be raised and new theory to be developed. The data from this study can be used as reference for other practitioner that wished to study the same area within other state. Apart from that, the practitioner also able to used other method in conducting the study to give more information and better result. Therefore, this study can helped other practitioners to conducted more new research, thus led to more new discoveries.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Conceptual and Operational Definition

According to Ahmad et al. (2014) conceptual definition is the definition of term in the study that appoint to the theoretical understanding of that certain term. The source for conceptual definition can be found for the book or past related research. It is different from operational definition in which operational definition is the procedure describing activities to be implemented to create an empirical or a level of existence that described by the concepts (Ahmad et al, 2014). It is specific term that will be used by the researcher in his research based on his understanding in what her study is all about.

Leadership style

The conceptual definition for leadership style is that leadership style can be explained as the way on how the organization intend to overcome any work related problem in the organization (Sirisookslip, Ariratana & Ngang, 2015). Other than that, other researchers such as Wahab, Rahmat, Yusof and Mohamed (2016) refer the leadership style as the characteristic, skills and behaviour that the individual wished to implement to deal with the employee performance. Apart from that, leadership style is the method use by the leaders to achieve his or her role in leading the organization, discover organization needs and perform any development that fit the organization (Golmoradi & Ardabili, 2016). For the operational definition leadership style in this study refer to the method that the leader use to manage their employees toward achieving the organization mission.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is the term used to represent a group of people that shared cultural norms (Desmet, Ortuno-Ortin & Wacziary, 2017). Other than that, Gom, Jiony, Tanakinjal and Siganul (2015) had mentioned that each ethnicity have different values and belief that they practice in which it will slowly but surely will evolved as the time passed. Kiang (2014) also said that ethnicity can be defined as a social construction that is always in a constant change that depended on how people within the group interact with each other. In addition, the operational definition for ethnicity in this study refer to the employees that have different culture, religion and language that work at public organization.

Work Performance

Work performance can be explained as the achievement that the employee has obtained toward accomplishment of the organizational goals (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2017). Apart from that, according to Rafie, Amini, and Foroozandeh (2014) work performance is the result of the employee action and skills in achieving the goal of the organization. Lastly,

work performance also can be described as one of the aspects that will affect the overall organizational performance (Berberoglu & Secim, 2015). The operational definition of work performance in this research refers to how well the employees work to accomplish their job.

1.7 Chapter summary

In conclusion, this chapter has given an overview about the research that intend to help the reader to understand what this research is all about. It gives the reader the ideas on what the research is trying to achieve. The next chapter would emphasize on the literature review of this research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the readers to relevant literature about the leadership style and ethnicity of the employees. Some of the literature reviews are the previous books, journals and also any published material that relate to this research. Sections that will be covered in this chapter are theoretical, past and practical research. This chapter also help to improve a better understanding on the study. Thus, this chapter is important as it introduce the reader to the general discussion regarding the particular area of interest in the study from past research.

2.1 Leadership style

There are many researchers that have done studies on leadership. It shows how the topic of leadership is becoming many of the researcher's interest. The importance of leadership cannot be denied as a good leadership can help the organization to manage, motivate and fully using their employee capability (Silva & Mendis, 2017). Other than that, a good leadership not only able to guide their employees but also can bring the employees together in order for them to achieve the organization goals. According to Silva and Mendis (2017) a good leadership can help the organization to face and manage any problem either from the inside or outside of the organization. The employees also play an important role in developing a good leader. This is because each leader has their own style of leadership in which the successfulness of the employees to cope and adapt with their employers leadership style can ease the employer to lead them. Therefore, a leader can implement any leadership style in order to guide their employees.

Each leader has their own leadership style in which they will adopt in the organization in order to lead and guide their employees. According to Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2019) each

leadership style can have different effect on developing competent employees. The leadership style that can be accepted by the organization including their employees play an important role in helping the employers to achieve the organization goals. Study by Saleem (2015) stated how leadership style influences the employee job satisfaction and performance. This show how the employees in which they are also come from different background and culture react differently toward different leadership style in term of their job performance, job motivation and also their job satisfaction.

2.2 Full range leadership style

One of the models of leadership is the Full Range Leadership Model by Bass and Avolio which consist of transformational, transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Full Range Leadership developed during the process in which Bass intend to model and measure transformational leadership that led to the development of Full Range Model in which from the Laissez Faire Leadership, Transactional leadership to the Transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). All of these approaches of leadership may be adopted by the organization in which one of the leadership may be implement more by the organization than the other. Although many research have been conducted based on this model, in this particular research the researcher more focus on the perspective of the employees about the leadership as it is still lacking in research.

2.2.1 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership style is one of the most common and popular leadership styles among the employees. According to Bass and Riggio (2006) transformational leadership focus more on the internal reward and a good quality development of the employee. This style of leadership suitable for employees that work to improve themselves in which the employees want to be led by capable leaders and also able challenge themselves in order to becoming high performer employee. Transformational leadership able to develop the

employees with good leadership capability due to the leader that implemented this style of leadership continuously encourage and influence their employees to achieve remarkable achievement by empowering their employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) also stated how the employees that prefer leader that apply transformational leadership will experience more job satisfaction as their leader show extraordinary capability and always emphasize and concern toward the employee needs and development. This will lead the employee to feel the sense of belonging toward the organization (Jiang, Zhao & Ni, 2017). Employees often prefer this style of leadership due to its potential in stimulating the employees to become more innovative and creative.

Apart from that, numerous research that has been conducted has found that transformational leadership greatly affect the employees in term of their work related behaviours and performance. According to Silva and Mendis (2017) the employees under transformational leadership often show great trust, loyalty and confident toward their leader. This is because leaders that implement transformational leadership will display great charisma that indicates that the leaders are full of vision and mission and also able to lead their employee. Leadership face a lot of challenge as there is no one leadership style that suitable for every situation in which the leader need to adapt and implement the right leadership that fit with the employee's background and the organization (Tarsik, Kassim & Nasharudin, 2014).

Transformational leadership cannot be denied as one of the leadership that can have a very great impact on the organization due to its nature that can motivate and inspire the employees toward achieving organization goals. The implementation of the right leadership style can affect the success or the failure of an organization. Based on Hussein, Aluwi, Noordin, Ishak and Abd Aziz (2017), transformational leadership often used by the leader if they intend to developing the organization because of the capability of transformational

leadership in helping the leader to produce deep understanding and able to being responsive to their employees demand and necessity. Other than that, it also has the ability to affect the organizational learning which then helps improve the innovation of the organization and led to the preparing of the future possibilities to prevent the decline in performance of the organization. Therefore, most employees adapt to this leadership because of how the leader reactive and impressionable toward them.

2.2.2 Transactional Leadership

According to Burke and Barron (2014) and Hughes, Ginnet and Curphy (2019), transactional leadership is more of an exchange process in which the great achievement of the employees comes with great reward. Transactional leadership also emphasize on the agreement between the leader and the employees in term of the reward if the goal is achieved and the penalty if it the goal is not met (Burke & Barron, 2014). Hughes et al. (2019) also stated that this style of leadership is common and effective however this leadership is not permanent because there is no purpose in continue the exchange relationship between the leader and the employees when the goal and transaction is achieve. In transactional leadership the employees are expected to follow the rules given by their leaders (Burke & Barron, 2014). Everything that is done by the employees is under the instruction and the rules of the leader. When things going wrong the employees will be considered at fault and will facing punishment. Therefore, in transactional leadership it emphasize on the achievement and fulfilment of job by the employees.

Transactional leadership emphasize on the leader perception on what are their employee needs in which the leader will then make clear on what the employees have to do in order to achieve their needs on standard that met with their goal and objectives (Baysak & Yener, 2015). As mention earlier on how transactional leadership is based on exchange relationship between the leaders and employees, thus it can be an advantage on employees

that highly motivated and great capability in completing a job because it will affect on what outcomes and reward that the employees will receives. A good leader will influence how their employees do their job and how advance and creative their employees in completing their task. In addition, Ali, Jangga, Ismail, Kamal and Ali (2015) stated that how mostly leaders that apply transactional leadership motivate their employees based on their self-interest. Thus, the leader is responsible in leading the employees on how the job is to be done in which the achievement of the employees will be rewarded by the leader.

Transactional leader also focus on the supervision of the leader toward their employees in order for them to gain information regarding their employees and the organization performance (Islam, Jantan, Rahman, Hamid, Mahmud & Hoque, 2018). The research on transactional leadership has been done numerous times, for examples, a study done has shown that transactional leadership can impact the employee performance thus lead to the employees to prefer this leadership as it will benefit them in term of reward that they will receive if the goal is achieve. Transactional leadership is based on the Contingent theory that stated that how a reward can affect the employees to give their best result in order to become a high performance employee (Islam, et al., 2018). Therefore, the transactional leadership offer a good reward to employees in which affect the employee perception on the leadership style.

2.2.3 Laissez-Faire leadership

Laissez-Faire is a type of leadership in which the leader being inactive or uninvolved in any job discussion (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) also stated that Laissez-Faire leadership depend on the employees to make their own decision in which the leader expect the employees to know what better for their leader and also the organization. Other than that, Laissez-faire often considered as leadership style that may bring problem to the organization as the leaders did not involve in an important or crucial discussion, however this

style of leadership also helping the leader as it allow the leader to get hold of oneself before he or she are able to deal with the organization problem reasonably.

There is numerous past studies on Laissez-Faire leadership that have been done by the researchers. According to Tarsik et al. (2014) Laissez-Faire leadership is the state in which the leader as much as possible trying to give freedom and empowerment to the employees and give little direction and orders to the employees. Laissez-Faire leadership also have little control over the employees as the employer that adopt this leadership style give little direction and without direct supervision to the employees (Tarsik et al., 2014). Moreover, leadership is the ability of the leader to affect the behaviour their employees and to lead them toward accomplish their job. Therefore, in adopting Laissez-Faire leadership the leader lead the employees by supplying the material and information and let the employees to make their own decision due to its non-participative nature of Laissez-Faire leadership (Linge, Shikalieh & Asiimwe, 2016).

In an organization, employer with Laissez-Faire leadership tends to avoid participating in work discussion and making decision. Therefore, according to Islam et al. (2018) employees under Laissez-Faire become naturally empowered as they are responsible in making decision with or without the supervision of the leader. In addition, the employee also does not receive feedback from the leader as well as any type of reward of their achievement in job. However, the employee will be given full power in making decision and complete their duty. Therefore, the employee will make decision based on how the employee thinks it will fit and benefit the organization.

2.3 Contingency theory

Contingency theory is the commonly used theory in the leadership study. Contingency theory explained that there is no best leadership for any situation (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). This theory emphasize on how leadership style rely on factor such as the